

Perky Bat Tower
Airport Road, 5 mis. N of
U.S. RTE 1
Perky
Sugar Loaf Key
Key West
Monroe County
Florida

HABS No. FL-193

HABS,
FLA,
44-KEY,
6-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. FLA-193

PERKY BAT TOWER

Location: One-half mile north of U.S. Route 1, on Airport Road near West Shore line. Perky, Sugar Loaf Key, Key West, Monroe County, Florida.

USGS Sargarloaf Key Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 17.442040.2726100

Present Owner: Rimersburg Coal Co., Pennsylvania.

Present Use: Not in use.

Significance: An unusual structure built to house bats as part of a local experiment in mosquito control.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1929.
2. Architect: Constructed from a plan developed by a Dr. Campbell of San Antonio, Texas.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Perky Properties, Incorporated in Florida, purchased this and surrounding property from the Bankers' Mortgage Loan Co. of Miami in 1925 (Deed Book D-4 p. 494). The present owners, the Rimersburg Coal Co. of Pennsylvania, acquired this property in 1956 (Deed Book OR-60, p. 397-400).
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Fred L. Johnson, Key West, Florida.
5. Original plan and construction: The Tower was built to house bats and special instructions were supplied for the construction. The wood was not painted, the building louvers were to face the prevailing breeze, and the location to be in a quiet area. A hopper to collect guano (excrement of sea fowls or other creatures such as bats used as fertilizer) was located in the center. The hopper was divided into compartments holding 50 pounds each. The roof eaves and louvers provided entrance and exit for the bats. The door under the louvers allowed for the placing of a special formula bait to attract the bats.

6. Alterations and additions: Unaltered.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

R.C. Perky of Denver, Colorado, came to Florida during the Florida boom and became the largest individual land owner in the Florida Keys. He built a large resort on Sugar Loaf Key, which he named Parky. His plans to build a city were interrupted by his death.

Dr. Campbell, who supplied the designs for the Tower, is said to have built seven bat towers in Texas and have proven them a successful means of eliminating mosquitoes. A book entitled Mosquitoes, Bats and Money was reportedly written about the experiment.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Monroe County Courthouse Records and Deed Books,
County Clerk's Records, Key West, Florida.

Monroe Land Title Co. Abstract, Key West, Florida.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Parks, Pat, "Visting along the Lower Keys"
Key West Citizen, Key West, Florida, February 28, 1967.

c. Interviews:

Johnson, Fred L. 1415 Newton Street, Key West, Florida.
July 18, 1967.

2. Likely sources not yet investigated:

Records in San Antonio, Texas, on Dr. Campbell.

Mosquitoes, Bats, and Money, Library of Congress,
Washington, D.C.

Prepared by Betty M. Bruce
Old Island Restoration
Foundation Inc.
Project Historian
HABS Key West Project
July 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This unique wood frame tower was designed to house bats in an effort to eliminate a mosquito hazard and to produce fertilizer.
2. Condition of fabric: Good

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Approximately 12' x 12' square in plan, truncated pyramid in elevation.
2. Foundations: Concrete footings, truncated concrete piers.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Dade County heart pine, 12" square posts fastened to piers with strap iron; sheet metal rat guards approximately 5'-0" above grade at each post; cypress shingles on wood strips form exterior finish; unpainted.
4. Structural system: Modified post and lintel construction.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorway: Rectangular doorway, south elevation, boarded shut.
 - b. Guano Hopper: Hopper below center of Tower soffit to retrieve guano, designed to hold 50 pounds in a compartment between sliding doors.

- c. Window: Louvered opening from above doorway to roof overhang to provide entrance for bats on south elevation to face prevailing breeze.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Hip roof covered with shingles.
- b. Eaves: Open eaves provide additional entrance for bats.

- 7. Inscription: An inscription on the southeast footing reads:
"Dedicated to good health at Perky, Florida by Mr. and Mrs.
R.C. Perky, March 15, 1929."

C. Description of Interior:

Interior inaccessible at occasion of survey. Frame work of 2" x 2" and 1 1/2" x 3" cypress lath as roosts for bats.

D. Site:

Located north of U.S. Highway #1, on Sugarloaf Key at Perky, near the West Shore Line. State Highway Department warehouse, concrete cistern south of this structure.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, AIA
Supervisory Architect
HABS Key West Project
June 1967

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared in 1967 during a summer project jointly sponsored by the Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc. of Key West, and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Twenty-two structures were recorded, ranging from commercial structures, residences and hospitals to a convent, a lighthouse, and the Memorial to the Victims of the Disaster of the U.S. Battleship Maine.

The project was under the direction of F. Blair Reeves, AIA, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, University of Florida. Measured drawings were prepared by student architects John D. Davenport and John F. Grimm of Texas A. and M. University, and John O. Crosby of the University of Florida. Mrs. Betty M. Bruce of the Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc., and Professor Reeves were responsible for the historical and architectural data. They were assisted by members of the Foundation. J. Franks Brooks, Photographer, of Key West, supplied the photographs.